

Acing a Job Interview after 50

By Joe Turner – A Former Recruiter

Randy Block, hears these comments often

- "I was fully qualified and it makes no sense."
- "They simply don't know how to hire."
- "They told me that I was overqualified."

If you're an "older" job hunter, more than likely you already know that the ultracompetitive job search process in today's economy is especially hard on you. Part of the challenge you're facing is a major generation gap between baby boomer job hunters and the Gen X hiring managers of today. As Block noted, "30-somethings don't want to hire their parents. Unfortunately, that's how we often come across – as their parents." You can succeed during interviews with younger hiring managers, but you'll want to think and act differently.

Here are five areas to start with:

Show passion for your work

If there is little passion or commitment from you for your work, how can you expect others to get excited during the interview? On the other hand, if you consider yourself driven or committed to what you do for a living, you'll most likely meet up with a hiring manager who has a shared interest in the same area. This, in fact, may be a new area for you as you undergo a possible career change. It gives you the opportunity to take your transferable skills and put them to use in some new ways for a different industry. If you're genuinely excited about your possibilities, your excitement can be contagious, especially during your interview.

Sell your brand

The best way to prepare for an interview is to start with a focus and brand that sells you. Develop a personal brand statement for yourself, a simple sentence that offers three important selling points about you. First, it should say who you are. Second, it should offer your biggest strength(s) and third, it should offer the biggest benefit that you would bring to your next employer. The purpose of your brand is to go beyond mere duties and job descriptions and get to the "what's in it for them" benefit that will make the employer sit up and take notice.

Being 'led' versus being managed

Another disparity that needs to be addressed, according to Block, is the fact that boomers want to be "led" and not managed. In his coaching practice, he found that most 30-something managers look for someone they can manage. In coaching sessions with young managers, he observed that their leadership skills typically lag behind their management skills.

If you're a boomer, take note and realize that you might not get the visionary leader you hoped for in your next hiring manager. Block has discovered that most young managers need help and guidance. They actually appreciate being mentored, coached or advised. They recognize the need, but look at it as a temporary or project-based opportunity.

This is an opportunity to sell yourself as a consultant whose many years of expertise can be useful in the role of a temporary coach or mentor. This may be a great meld between the "management versus leadership" dichotomy. This also increases your opportunities, since companies are hiring more consultants in this economic downturn. As the economy improves, that 1099 contract could well turn into a salaried position.

Think 'tactical' versus 'strategic'

According to Block and other employment analysts, many companies today view their short-term survival needs as having paramount importance. They're looking for players who can hit the ground now and help them grunt through the next six to nine months. That will require a change in your marketing approach as phrases such as "long-term" and "strategic" won't have the sales impact of a year ago. Rather than emphasize the long haul in your résumé and interview marketing, look instead at selling yourself as an expert who can get in and fix the problems of today quickly and efficiently. Downplay any talk about long-range solutions and instead focus on clear, results-oriented achievements for short-range problems.

Talk money

Money talks and it talks loudly. Money can also trump age, so try to get as close to the money as you can when you describe who you are and what you bring to the table.

Keep in mind that all organizations have only two basic needs: revenue and productivity. This is what keeps any top manager up at night. If you can help them, they will seek your advice and counsel. Therefore, come to the interview armed with specific examples of how you can solve their money (or productivity) problem. Your past achievements are examples of how to tackle the similar problems they're faced with today. If you can show yourself to be the problem-solver they need, you'll quickly rise to the shortlist of candidates. Your goal is to become the "go-to" person for their short-term revenue or productivity problems.

Summary

Gen X managers need your help. Your working relationship will likely begin as either part time or a short-term contract but can extend into full time once you've proven yourself. Focus on ways you can help their short term "survivability" through this recession and get as close as you can to their revenue or productivity concerns. Talk money and how you can help them produce immediate results. A younger manager would have to be shortsighted not to explore a working relationship with someone more experienced. Capitalize on your wealth of experience to make a positive difference in the lives and careers of the Gen Xers.

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